

*"A caregiver is a person who is doing something for someone else that contributes to their ability to remain living in the community."*

## November is National Family Caregivers Month

Approximately 43.5 million caregivers have provided unpaid care to an adult or child in the last 12 months. [National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP. (2015).]

**The value of a family caregiver is beyond measure**  
but people have tried to measure.

It has been calculated that if all the family caregivers quit, it would cost the US over \$470 billion! [in 2013 -AARP Public Policy Institute. (2015).]



**Rewards of caregiving** Being a caregiver can be challenging and stressful but caregivers also say their role can be very meaningful. Here are some rewards you may experience:

- ♥ You may gain new skills
- ♥ You may develop new and lasting friendships
- ♥ You may learn to find joy in small pleasures
- ♥ You have a chance to give back to someone important in your life
- ♥ You can learn about yourself and your limits
- ♥ You can learn new ways of taking care of yourself too

Caregiving can be an opportunity to: be useful and appreciated, help maximize another person's independence and dignity, help someone as you would wish to be helped, and say I love you.

## THIS MONTH'S FAVORITE CAREGIVER TIPS

- ♥ Make sure legal documents are in order.
- ♥ Seek support from other caregivers. You are not alone!
- ♥ Take care of your own health so that you can be strong enough to take care of your loved one.
- ♥ Accept offers of help and suggest specific things people can do to help you.
- ♥ Learn how to communicate effectively with doctors.
- ♥ Caregiving is hard work so take respite breaks often.
- ♥ Be open to new technologies that can help you care for your loved one.
- ♥ Organize medical information so it's up to date and easy to find.
- ♥ Give yourself credit for doing the best that you can
- ♥ **Laughter is the best medicine.**

Go ahead and give it a try. Turn the corners of your mouth up into a smile and then give a laugh, even if it feels a little forced. Once you've had your chuckle, take stock of how you're feeling. Are your muscles a little less tense? Do you feel more relaxed or buoyant? That's the natural wonder of laughter at work.





## THAT ONE HABIT

Bet you thought I meant the one habit you should break – ‘cause we all have those bad habits we know we should do something about. But no. This is about the one habit you should try to cultivate.

Good self-care has been called “the habit that gives back”.

Self-care is especially important for caregivers. Think about it – if something happens to you, who will take over your caregiving duties? Caregiving is a stressful job. The argument for taking care of yourself is the same one you hear on an airplane – “put your own oxygen on first”. You are a less stressed, more healthy caregiver if you take care of yourself first. This makes sense when you see statistics like the one that says that 30% of all caregivers will die before the person they are taking care of.

Making self-care a habit is not as time consuming as you may assume. Here are some tips to get started (or encouragement to continue if you already have this habit):

- Learn to say “no”. You may not be able to continue doing all the things you used to do and that is ok. Your life has changed. But it will change again. Decide what things you need to do for you.
- Stretch every morning. Grab 10 minutes later in the day to jog in place or some other exercise you enjoy.
- Schedule regular 10-15 minute breaks. Remind yourself this is for you AND your loved one. Some things to try:
  - A quick walk around the block or just around your yard. Get some sun!
  - 15 minutes in a bubble bath or do a hand massage
  - One chapter of a book while your loved one is napping or watching TV. Or just light a candle in a scent you enjoy and relax with feet up. *(the laundry can wait)*
  - 15 minutes after lunch for an activity you enjoy – knit, do a puzzle, play solitaire
  - Call a friend for a quick update. Invite them over for coffee break.
- Count your blessings every day.
- If someone asks if they can help and you don’t need help (yet) ask if they would be willing to have you call them when you do need help. Then if they say yes, don’t hesitate to call if you really want someone to pick up a pizza and bring it over, or clean while you take a quick nap – whatever other small thing you need help with.



**CAREGIVERS ARE HEROS**



**Dodge County  
CAREGIVERS – we so  
appreciate you!**  
**Please call if there is  
something we could  
help you with.**



### Caregiver Handbook

for Caregivers  
in Dodge County, WI



**Dodge County  
Caregiver Handbook  
now available at the ADRC**

**To get yours contact-free, call  
and we will mail it to you or ask  
for it at your local library.**



**920-386-3580**